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UMAR KHAYYAM AND HIS AGE

BY

OTTO ROTHFELD.

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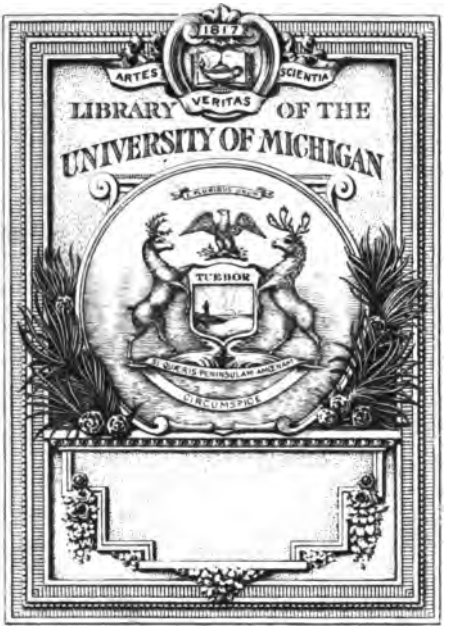

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UMAR KHAYYAM AND HIS AGE.

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Rothfield, Otto

Umar Khayyam And His Age

By

OTTO ROTHFELD,

B.A. (OXON.), I.C.S., F.R.G.S., M.L.C.

(*Author of "Women of India," etc.*)

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DEDICATED TO

NORAH DICKIN—A True Friend.

"Though little has been said, yet understand much." *Gujarati Saying.*

15th December 1921.

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PREFACE.

THE work of Umar Khayyam has been so much the subject of study in recent years that the need for any further writing may perhaps be questioned. It is hoped, however, that an appreciation of the poet, as seen by one who has lived much of his life in the East and among Mussalmans and who has read and spoken Persian familiarly for many years, may perhaps bring out with added light and clearness the real worth of the quatrains and their meaning.

Perhaps the strongest justification may, however, be found in the analysis here attempted of the state of society and its spirit at the time that Umar lived. It has been attempted in this book —it is believed for the first time—to correlate Umar Khayyam's work to the historical and spiritual development of Islam and in particular to summarize and explain the nature of Persian influence upon the 'Abbasid Khalifate and the great period of Muhammadan civilization. This has not so far been done: and both student and

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general reader have had, if they wished for information, to trace and peruse isolated monographs on different aspects of the case in at least three languages. It is believed, it is at any rate hoped, that the first half of this book will present the general reader no less than the student with a succinct and readable account of the main facts of that development.

The writer is indebted to many books for his facts and the conclusions he has based on the facts. All of them cannot be mentioned here. But he must mention with particular gratitude—in addition to Professor Browne's standard work on Persian literature—the "Récherches sur les Rubaiyat" written by A. Christensen and published in 1905; Ignacz Goldziher's excellent study of "The Influence of Parsiism on Islam" published in English in 1912; Sir Edward Denison Ross's introduction to the edition of 1900; and Von Kramer's fine history of the Islamic spirit.

In addition, the writer owes a great deal, as will be apparent from the pages of this book, to Whinfield's admirable recension of the text and his really wonderful verse translation of the original quatrains. His translations have been freely used and quoted and their excellency

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will be apparent to every reader. It need only be added that no one who is interested in the work of Umar Khayyam can afford to be without a copy of Whinfield's edition.

It requires to be added that for well-known names the usual English spelling has been followed, and that no attempt has in such cases been made to distinguish *ain* or *hamza*. Notably the poet's own name has been printed as Umar, except in one passage, where it is given in full, and there properly transliterated as ' Umar. This is admittedly inconsistent. But any other course is met with other difficulties.

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Umar's Life and Period.

Historical Summary. In the eleventh century after Christ, the empires of Central Asia were being shaken by great events. The Sultan Mahmud the Ghaznavi died in the year 1030, and was succeeded by his son Mas'ud. But four years later the Turkish tribe of the Seljuks, led by the brothers Toghrul and Chakir,* revolted against their prince. The history of the next twenty years is that of the constant and triumphant progress of the Seljuk arms. In 1037 the city of Merv surrendered to Chakir, and within a year Nishapur, the capital of Khorassan, was captured by Toghrul. The latter prince had overthrown Anushirwan, the Persian chieftain, in another three years. In 1055 he entered Baghdad at the head of his victorious army, and by the extorted or the voluntary decree of a *fainéant* Khalifa was proclaimed Sultan of Persia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. With the survivors

* The name is mistakenly given as Jafar by Gibbon in his 57th Chapter, from a misplacing of the points upon the Arabic letters.

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of the Ghaznavian dynasty he made a treaty which gave him the provinces of Balkh, Khorassan, Herat and Seistan. He put the seal to his power and the impotence of the Khalifa by his marriage with that sovereign's daughter. In 1060, on the death of Chakir, the great ruler Alp Arslan succeeded to the governorship of the Eastern States, and in 1063 he succeeded Toghrul as Sultan of the united empire. In 1071 Romanus Diogenes, a brave and able leader, in command of the remaining legions of the Byzantine empire, was defeated by the Turkish armies of Alp Arslan, mainly through treachery. A year later Alp Arslan, the conqueror, was laid low by the assassin's dagger, to be succeeded in turn by Malik Shah, a prince as renowned in administration as in war. Assisted by Nizam-ul-Mulk, who continued to be his minister, as he had been Alp Arslan's, he encouraged learning, founded or embellished cities, and promoted progress and prosperity. But Nizam-ul-Mulk was murdered in 1092 and in the same year the Seljuk sovereign, Malik Shah, passed away. The next twenty years are a disheartening record of disorder and civil war at home, while the empire was attacked from abroad

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by the coalition of Byzantine diplomacy and barbarian vigour in the first crusade. During the same period in 1066 the Battle of Hastings was fought, which handed over the rule of the British Isles from the headmen of a number of petty Teutonic tribes to a chief of more or less settled robbers of the coast of France. In Europe the people continued ignorant, dirty and distressed, while oppressive priests and cruel barons clawed at each other's throats for the privileges of brigandage and rape. The Roman Empire domiciled at Byzantine had for a century shown some signs of a revival of learning, and its citizens at least used water for the purposes of cleanliness. But in any active sense civilization was barely known outside of the Mussulman East.

Umar's Family.

This was the world when Ghiyath-ud-din Abu'l Fath ' Umar ibn Ibraham al Khayyami was born and lived in Khorassan at Nishapur. The long name has been shortened in common speech and he is known to all men as Umar Khayyam. Conjectures have been formed upon his name that his father at least—perhaps he himself—was by actual trade a tent-maker. The word Khayyam, taken by Umar

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in his quotations as his *Takhallus* or poetic pseudonym—the name or title which a Persian poet usually inserts in the last couplet of an ode and sometimes even in a quatrain—bears, in fact, in Arabic the significance of a "maker of tents." One also of the extant quatrains, ascribed to Umar but almost certainly apocryphal, has a play upon the word, which, if accepted, might well justify the inference. But, all said and done, were even the actual name Khayyami the same as Khayyam, which it is not, it would no more necessarily imply his or his father's business with tents and their stitching than the name of Baker in England means an immediate intimacy with loaves and their baking. The conjecture is opposed to all that is known of Umar's schooling, his friends or his social position. Even in that age of education in Persia, it would be unlikely that the son of a humble artisan should be sent to college. It would be increasingly improbable that he should study metaphysics, and the higher mathematics, that before middle age he should be an astronomer of acknowledged reputation, and that he should be admitted to the table and fellowship of nobles and princes. The facts support what the real name suggests, that it was a mere patronymic, the

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cognomen probably of some small and forgotten tribe, of mixed descent perhaps or of an obscure and lucrative tranquillity. From all the known facts—one might add from all the legends gathered round him—one must conclude that he came of a family of some position, fairly well to do.

The Legend of the Three Friends.

In one respect at least the inventions of legend are forced to accord with Aristotle's description of good tragedy—they may deal in the impossible but they cannot narrate what is improbable. Legend may cheerfully disregard the ordinary limitations of time and place. It may make its hero appear at one and the same time in two places. It may put the words of mature wisdom upon the lips of childhood. It may, as it has done in Umar's case, make the mother of a centenarian live to survive him. But it may not display actions that are glaringly inconsistent with character or personality. It cannot, for instance, put the words of Jesus into Caesar's mouth, or make a conqueror speak like a saint. In Umar's case, no legend has been so inconsistent as to make him out a tent-maker, but only lazy onjecture. There is, however, one picturesque

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legend which must be rejected with regret, not because in itself it is improbable, but because it is actually impossible. The story made him one of three school-friends and sworn comrades, the others being Nizam-ul-Mulk, the great minister, and Hassan ibn Sabah, the "old man of the mountains." It is indeed probable enough that Umar knew the minister: it is a fact at least that he was on intimate terms with his Deputy in Khorassan, and he himself remarks with gratitude on the encouragement he received from such a patron. It is improbable indeed that he should not have known Nizam-ul-Mulk. The position of each was such, the great scientist at the schools of Nishapur, the glory of a rich and cultured capital, and the sagacious and reforming minister, so frequent a visitor and so eager for the advancement of learning, that they could hardly have avoided meeting. But that they should have been at school together, that as schoolboys they should have made the compact so artlessly narrated, this is impossible on the dates, unless one assumes a coincidence of longevities and a concatenation of circumstances so unnatural as to require a miracle to support

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them. The authority for the legend, it may be added, is late and extremely doubtful. With Hassan ibn Sabah, on the other hand, it is just possible that Umar might have been to school. But there is nothing to show it except the same discredited legend. Hassan ibn Sabah's name at least and the deeds of his followers must have bulked largely in Umar's life. For thirty years at any rate of his career, the doings of that sect commanded by Hassan from his rock-castle at Alamut, hung like a shadow over the Seljuk Empire. The Assassins, as they were called, played a part in every religious riot of the time, and such turbulences were many. They influenced the progress of the crusade. They reigned with terror over Ispahan. They murdered Nizam-ul-Mulk and were exposed to massacre by the Sovereign's order. Umar could never be out of hearing of Hassan's name and it is probable enough that he met that fiery and ambitious man when as a student at Nishapur he learned the doctrines and took the vow of the Ismailis, before he went to Cairo and probed the possibilities of an heretical power.

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Dates of Umar's Birth and Death.

It is not possible exactly to determine when Umar was born. The dates usually given are between A.D. 1015 and 1020. But the date of his death is known with certainty. He died at Nishapur in A.D. 1123. If, therefore, the former dates be accepted for his birth, he died more than a centenarian, yet sufficiently active in mind still to converse with students and to expound divinity or philosophy. That he was in fact a very old man when he died is known but the report of an age so advanced draws rather too much upon the author's credit. It becomes more doubtful, when there was so great a temptation to invent the date in order to fit into the legend, already discarded, of the three friends. Comparing, however, the known date when Umar, as one of the foremost astronomers of the age, was summoned to the reform of the calendar, it may be assumed as certain that he was born not later than A.D. 1040. At the least, therefore, he was well over 80 when he died, a man of acknowledged learning, surrounded by respect and veneration.

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Umar's Travels. During his long life Umar travelled extensively over what was then the civilized world. He performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. He visited and, it appears, stayed long at Merv, the home and capital of the Seljuk Sultanate. He saw Balkh and Bokhara. It is almost certain that he went to Baghdad, where, veiled in black robes, the shadow of an 'Abbasid Khalifa' still clutched the sign-manual of religious primacy in nerveless fingers, though the arm of a Turkish Emperor brandished the temporal sword. In that age, it must be remembered, the country, or *patria*, of Umar and his co-nationalists was not Persia, as it once was and as we again define it now, but rather Central Asia. Persia proper—Fars and the dependent provinces—had for generations been little better than an anarchy, a land of evil and divided princes. The orientation of empire was to the east. Herat, Ghazni, Afghanistan and Balkh, all that is now called Turkestan, the upland slopes and mountains, these with the hot plains of Seistan and the prosperous province of Khorassan, formed the real sultanate, the true *imperium*, Persian because it was Persian speaking, as indeed in great part it still is in spite

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of Turkish ingression. Here, doubtfully at the precarious northern frontiers, ruled Mahmud of Ghazni. Here most undoubtedly ruled the Seljuk Sultans. This was the home country, the seat of the true imperial people. The rest of Persia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor were the annexures of a growing sovereignty. It was in this home country that Umar travelled most, moving from capital to capital, summoned to the Sultan's Court, and visiting no doubt the learned in the various colleges and universities. That he voyaged also to Mecca may have been due perhaps to curiosity or to those mixed feelings which still impel the least believing of Christians to the Vatican, hinged on the desire to view the central symbol of what after all is an ineradicable influence, an actual and not negligible fact. It may, however, also have been due to a wish to elude, in a period of aggressive bigotry, the charges which might be urged with danger against the writer. This is the motive, not unreasonable, which Ibn al Kifti ascribes to Umar's pilgrimage.

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Umar's Home.

But for the most part of his life, Nishapur, his birth-place, remained Umar's home. It is now no more than a broken-down town with forty thousand inhabitants, though it is still the centre of what poor trade remains to Khorassan. But in the eleventh century it was the splendid capital of a prosperous province. The Mongols had not yet come to devastate the land, and change it to a wilderness. In the Persian language Khorassan means "the land of the sun," but the sun is tempered, even if the climate is tropical. The soil is fertile in the plains, and at that age the country was still well irrigated and its agriculture rich and intensive. The cotton crops were heavy and of fine staple, and at their season the dull green of the fields was whitened as with snow by the white of the bursting bolls. Round the plains rose bold bare mountain ranges. Homespuns were woven in the houses of the people, and shawls and carpets were wrought out of the fleeces of their flocks. It was by nature the richest, and by the craft of man had grown the most commercial, province in the empire. Nishapur, the capital, was the first and perhaps the fairest city in the Persian land, and was counted third

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or fourth in all the world. It had its palaces and its great offices. It possessed no less than six colleges, for the study of theology, science and philosophy: and Nizam-ul-Mulk had built in it a great observatory.

Umar's Works.

One has to picture Umar living there, a scholar and a scientist, growing from year to year in honour and renown, yet also a man of the world, sought by the great, and taking his part in the best and most urbane society of the age. It was a society that venerated scholarship, and Umar was first and above all a man of learning. To himself and to his contemporaries it must have seemed that he owed his eminence to his serious studies and his scientific attainments. He had studied theology and philosophy, both logic and metaphysics, then as even now the main curriculum of a Muslim University. But upon this foundation of habitual scholarship he had erected a special monument of scientific research. Medicine he studied, and was well reputed for its practice, being called into consultation by his monarch in the illness of the heir-apparent, the Prince Sanjar. But his greatest achievements were in mathematics. He was acknowledged to be a leader in

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algebra. In the application of mathematics to astronomy he attained an almost equal eminence. Dissatisfied with the existing calendar, the Sultan Malik Shah summoned the leading astronomers of the world to devise its reform, and the name of Umar is indissolubly connected with the revised Jalali calendar, the best at that date recorded by mankind. Even a hostile critic like Ibn al Kifti has to admit that "there was no one equal to him in astronomy and philosophy." He wrote ten books in all, of which three dealt with the natural sciences, four with mathematics, two were on metaphysics, and one was a light volume of verses. Three of those works have survived. One is a monograph on certain difficulties in the definitions of Euclid. Another is a treatise on Algebra, in which he was the first to treat of cubic equations. The third is the book of quatrains, on which the fame of the scientist now depends. The weighty acquisitions of knowledge have sunk: the burden of human love and suffering has ridden safely upon the sea of time.

Umar's Character.

Fortunately Umar was much more than mere scientist. In his varied interests and his manner of life he resembled not remotely Ibn Sina—Avicenna—the

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great master whom he so much respected, though more fortunate by far he stood aside from politics. Avicenna had not much preceded Umar in order of time. Himself also a native of Persian Central Asia, he was born near Bokhara in 983 A.D. But, pre-eminent as he was in philosophy and science, he was no less a man of affairs and a man of pleasure. His days were spent in the intrigue and policy of the State, and he gave his nights alternately to study or to dissipation. Emancipated from the creeds, he was a rationalist, a lover of wine, a lover of women. He was fond of music and song, and he wrote verses of merit. He tasked his fine brain with laborious research and reflection, while at the same time displaying a practical ability that carried him to the position of Vizier or Prime Minister. Exhausted by his studies no less than by his pleasures, he passed away when he was little more than fifty : but few men in these years can have crowded so much of life.

The very fact that some of the extant quatrains have been ascribed both to Avicenna and to Umar Khayyam goes to prove the similarities in their characters. Both were rationalists or free-thinkers. Avicenna had, moreover, a definite

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belief, like the English philosophers of the 18th century, in innate moral sentiments, in a will for good implanted in human nature. This belief also Umar Khayyam seems ready enough to share. Both liked wine. Both were alike in another and more important matter, which, in writing of a Persian poet, cannot be passed entirely without remark. It is well-known and has been described in detail by Sir Richard Burton * how a certain vice has from remote times flourished in a belt of land stretching on both sides of the Mediterranean across Asia Minor, through Persia and into Afghanistan and Sind. Nowhere, not even in ancient Greece, was the vice more general and more flagrant than in Persia. It not only corrupted society: it perverted poetry as well. By a general convention, it is a boy who is the beloved friend to whom Persian poems are addressed. It is true indeed that the pronouns in the Persian language do not distinguish gender, and thus in many cases it may be only fair to give the benefit of the doubt to the singer. It may also be conceded that in other cases it is a mere literary conven-

* See Terminal Essay to Sir Richard Burton's translation of the Arabian Nights.

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tion which is being followed and that the poet in person may reasonably be discharged without a stigma. Yet, when all deductions have been made, it is unhappily the fact that only too many writings remain of an unmistakable allusion. Even Sheikh Sa'adi, the respectable model of all bourgeois virtues, and exemplar of so many Mussulman homes, has written enough, notably in his chapter on "Love", to give away his character for ever on this side. Now, neither of Avicenna nor of Umar Khayyam can such a thing be hinted. Both write unmistakably of women, even if the pronoun be of common gender. Both, when they speak of love mean the legitimate and rightful love of woman. The quatrains of Umar are seldom gross, but the rare indecencies serve to acquit him at once from any inclination to the national vice. The European reader at least feels grateful that the poet deals with love naturally like a man. Renan,* writing upon Umar, after a hasty reading of a French translation of the Ruba'iat—writing, too, with all the austere, if sugary-sweetened, prejudices of a Jansenist—said of the poet that he was "mystical in appearance, debauched in reality, a consum-

* See Compte Rendu de la Societè Asiatique de 1868, Rapport Annuel, p. 56.

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mate hypocrite, mingling blasphemy with mystic anthems and laughter with incredulity." The judgment is severe and perverse. It will be sufficiently refuted by the consideration of his actual poems. But it can be rebutted at once by Luther's saying; for Umar certainly "loved wine, woman and song."

The Nature of the Period.

But the period in which Umar lived must be considered in some detail. What mentally and in spiritual and emotional value was the age in which men like Avicenna and Umar lived and had their glory? What were the forces from which they drew their inspiration, and the stresses against which they had to strain? To know the man, one must first analyse the thoughts and desires that moulded those generations in Persia, and briefly depict the growth and changing content of Islam.

The dominant influence exerted upon Islamic culture by Persian thought must first be borne in mind. In this place it is not necessary to discuss the extent to which Aramaic ideas are revealed in the Qur'an. It need only be briefly stated that even in the sacred scripture the spirit of Persia is abundantly manifested, side by side with the grim

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Arab exposition of the single and powerful God. While the Umayyad Khalifas ruled in Damascus, they preserved Arab power and an Arab tradition. To them the important tenets of the faith—almost, they thought, the only tenets that mattered for knowledge or observance—were the Unity of God and His Omnipotence. They were indifferent to interpretations and commentaries, indifferent to independent reasoning on other questions of faith, were in fact what Goldziher has called "confessionally indifferent." The main policy of their rule was the preservation of Arab, or rather Northern Arabic, political power. The Persians they regarded as an inferior race and despised with all the lofty disdain of Arab nobility, the arrogance of tribal chieflets, rich only in their precious genealogies. Yet even of the Umayyads the Khalifa Suleman, as early as A.D. 715, had to exclaim: "I am amazed at the Persians. They have ruled one thousand years and never needed us for a moment, while we have reigned for one hundred years and not even for a moment have been able to do without them."

When the Umayyad dynasty fell, largely because of the free Persian support given to the

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rival Abbasids, the influence of this people became supreme throughout Mussulman Asia. The Arab language of course—the language of the conquerors, the language of the Holy Book—continued for another two centuries to be the vehicle of the Court, of learning and of administration. In it were written the translations and expositions in which Arabic civilization carried the embers of the Greek spirit and rekindled a flame to warm the whole world, works to which the Arabs owe half their reputation. But the pen that wrote and the mind that guided were in most cases Persian. Indigenous Arab works, like the famous "Assemblies" of Al-Hariri were comparatively few. The impulse to the writing of history in particular came to Arabic literature from the Persian people, and no class of men has ever studied science with a more generous enthusiasm than the Persian officials of the Imperial Court. Their influence met frequent resistance. They aroused dislikes: they were often rebuffed: they suffered disasters at the Court of Baghdad. But they maintained their authority in affairs and learning.

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The Persian Spirit.

Now in their religious thought, the Persians had in pre-Islamic times combined the scepticism of a lively and vivacious temperament with the observance of a rigid ecclesiastical polity. When they could, they indulged in the boldest speculation and sought to plumb the Universe by the human understanding. Their thinkers reflected and selected from the creeds and philosophies of alien countries. In that province of Khorassan in which Umar was to be born, followers of Buddha or of the Hindu Vedanta had for centuries existed. The Vedantic teaching of an illusory world of appearances and an all-pervasive but imperceptible absolute reality had indeed made some way among all the Persian peoples. From the west, on the other hand, had come the influence of Greek thought, most familiarly in its latest Neo-Platonic form, and had made general the notion of pantheism, with an unknowable but immanent absolute, and radiating degrees of divine emanation. With the speculative mind of the Persian went also a temperament deeply pessimistic—a temperament that found expression in the tenets of the Manichæans and the Mazdalis. Zoroastrian orthodoxy it is true, embodied a

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forced optimism in the Avestas. But the character of the people remained at bottom as it was, inert and passive under the oppression of a destiny which made man its plaything for a passing moment and tossed him back again from illusion into nothingness. Nothing mattered, so it seemed to them, the worst or the best, and all was at the end futile and without worth. Destruction waited upon life, and life waited only for its death. The spirit is that which is finely expressed in a verse of Shelley's :

" There's not one atom of yon earth
But once was living man :
Nor the minutest drop of rain
That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
But flowed in human vein."

But, for all this free thought and eclecticism, a hereditary priesthood had contrived to build and preserve a very rigid theocracy. Its power was limited in area and never succeeded in imposing itself entirely on the whole Persian realm. But it was unrelenting in its exercise at the centre. Even the ruler—the king of kings—was sanctified as the titular head of a hierarchy and the actual

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servant of its policy. The inhabitants within the commonwealth—whatever their inner beliefs might be—were not allowed to deviate from the rigidities of ritual and observance. The maintenance of the priesthood in its dignities, and its power to direct in affairs of state as well as conscience, had been a primary law of the old Sassanian constitution.

Even after Islam had come, Khorassan continued to be a home for the ideas of pantheism and the dreams of incarnation. In the second century after the Hijra, for instance, Babek could preach communism and inculcate doctrines of metamorphosis. When Abu Muslim, a brilliant general, succeeded in overthrowing the dynasty of the Umayyads, there were many who believed him to be an incarnation of the Deity. An actual claim to incarnate divinity was made under the second Khalifa of the Abbasids by a knaveor fanatic called Ostasys, who led thousands of unfortunate followers to defeat and slaughter in a bloody battle. In the city of Merv a similar claim was revived with similar results by ' Ata the Mokanna. Throughout the changes of dynasty and constitutional form in Persia, these ideas still managed

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to survive and to exercise some imponderable influence on the national spirit.

The overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty and its displacement, largely with Persian assistance, by the Abbasids was, therefore, more than a political event: it became a religious or a spiritual revolution. In the place of a mundane leader in the Muslim world, there was now imposed on the Persian model the figure of an absolute and theocratic ruler, a vicar of God charged with the interpretation and execution of His commandments and for the purpose endowed with the temporal sword. In that Islam, in which its Prophet had pronounced should be neither priest nor monk, a powerful priesthood began to establish its exclusive privileges and to introduce a system of hereditary transmission. The notion of ritual impurity (*nijasat*), which though here and there suggested in their traditions was in essence foreign to the Arabs, was now reinforced by the support of Persian authority. The form of the Mussulman State reverted in many respects to the conceptions that had shaped the empire of Darius and the later empire of Bahram Gur and

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Anushirwan. The contents of religious belief were profoundly modified by the same material influences. To the subtle Persian mind, with its leanings to Greek and Hindu speculation, the bare Semitic tenets of Unity and Omnipotence seemed thin and insufficient. The doctrine of emanations, found in the writings of the Neo-Platonists, began to be imported into current faith. The Shi'ah sect began to take its separate shape. As the Catholic Church in Europe enriched a bare reforming creed by incorporating the myths long believed by simple people and achieved a living strength by its transfusion of an older folk-lore, so the Shiah faith became a truly national religion by its colouring of old and popular beliefs. In its teaching of the existence of religious leaders, called Imams, whether the leader was known and present or hidden by a miracle from the sight of man, incarnated for each succeeding age by divine grace, it repeats something not very different from the emanations of the Neo-Platonists. The succession of the Imams was a continuous revelation of God, established either by direct incarnation in the successor or in other cases by the migration of the soul from one to

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another. *The person of Hazrat-i-'Ali again is exalted to a vast and mystical figure, more than half-divine, the nucleus of a thousand miracles and legends, and fills in the thought of the Mussulman Persian something of the place filled for his ancestors by the Ormuzd of the Zoroastrians. The active and autocratic person of the Semitic Deity is refined to an Absolute Truth and Reality, ultimate and all-pervading, but hardly if at all recognised as a direct agent in the affairs of man. Even the Prophet, like the God from whom he emanates, is regarded rather as a symbol than as an active personality. But the sacred word, the Qur'an, like the Logos of the Gnostics is, in the eye of the believer, eternal and uncreated. The saints, moreover, are very real and very active.

The extreme forms of the new faith—so deeply shaped by non-Arabic thought—were not proclaimed except in Persia. But their values to some quite recognizable degree penetrated every corner of the Khalifate and left significant traces in all Arabic theology. They gave rise to manifold disputes and heresies: they ended as usual in

* See Ibn Khaldan Prolegomena (I. 404), and Shahrastani, (I. 170.)

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persecution and massacre. It was not long before the Abbasid rulers, Vicars of God and successors of the Prophet, became themselves imbued in the renascent spirit. They gave themselves freely to enquiry and speculation. The Khalifa Al Mansur won deserved fame for the encouragement he gave to the study of astronomy, and was surrounded by a circle of clever men interested in law, medicine and literature. At this time even the Court dress was modelled on the Persian. Under the Khalifa Al Ma'mun, the son of a Persian mother, the renascence was at its culmination. The sovereign himself collected the volumes of Greek science and secured their translation. He gathered round himself learned men, mostly Persians, and inclined his mind to the sentiments of a race to whose assistance he owed the conquest of Merv. Philosophy found in him an attentive and sympathetic listener. Of rational enquiry and interpretation he was tolerant, and he decreed that the Qur'an should be held to be created. The power of the Khalifa's activity and name assisted freedom of thought in every exploration, and in his reign Islamic culture under Persian guidance reached its last altitude.

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Persian Mysticism.

But while the schools were flourishing and the controversies of nominalist and realist echoed to the Court, the spirit of mysticism was also gathering force from Persian pressure, the spirit which reaches towards the divine through love and self-abandonment. The early mystics of Islam, among them eminent one Rabi'ah, a woman of saintly habit, were isolated figures, moved each by a separate impulse to an ecstasy of devotion. But even in them appeared some trace of the pantheism, the sense of God in all things, which had come to Persia from the Sanskrit philosophers. As the inspiration spread, the mystics came together. The brotherhood of the Sufis, as the mystics of Islam were ever afterwards called, was already in being by the time when the most notorious of their leaders, Mansur-al-Hallaj, a Persian by race though of Arab speech, was crucified on the 13th March 923. During the next century its following increased. As it grew, its tenets were developed and made systematic. The path to God along the way of Love was measured into four stages, and the novice had, by patience and self-denial, to train himself before he could climb the summit of intuition, when at

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last the mystic became the true theorist (*'arif*). The divinity they hoped to view was a spirit of which all actual things are forms, a spirit in which all things are even as God. Matter and spirit, they held, and good and evil, were equally divine. Reason could not know Him, nor sense perceive. Only by perfect love could His presence be attained, and the end was a selfless absorption in the universal being, an absorption leaving as little for individual existence or perception as any Buddhist Nirvana. But human love, the mystics taught, led men to divine love, and the desire of man for woman was an exemplar of the ultimate desire for God. By the age of Umar Khayyam the school or brotherhood was a power and its influence perceptible in all the congregations of the learned. From Al Ghazzali * it is clear that in this age Pantheism had even reached a greater extension and was widespread among the humbler classes both in towns and villages. The pious Abu Sa'id, who died as early as 1048 A.D., was the first and one of the best of the poets of the school, and—for all his piety—extols human and profane love as the only means of preparing for that divine love to which it is a

* See Ihja of Al-Ghazzali (I. 45).

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duty to aspire. In this at least the doctrine is superior to the cold and cruel chastity inculcated in Christian disciplines, and displays a finer and more felicitous humanity. But the pessimism of Persia also touched the spirit of the Sufis, and they contemplate with deep sadness a world of transient illusion. Even before Umar the note was already struck in the poems of Shahid of Bactria, a disciple of the great artist Rudagi.

> "If grief," he says, "if grief emitted smoke like fire,
>
> The world would always be enveloped in night."

Persian Good Living.

But the ordinary Persian, while all these speculations were being followed above his head, continued to be during the age of Umar what in the main he has always been, a man fond of good living, witty, cheerful, and a lover of amusement, not too rigid either in act or speech, with a large strain of vanity, both about himself and his country's virtues. For wine especially the Persian had always had a weakness. This was his feeble side, and not all the prohibitions of the

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Arab Prophet—as the Persians are apt to call the Prophet Muhammad in their confidential hours—could stop his indulgence in the forbidden liquor. Good reasons were of course readily manufactured for its use, as they always are to "compound for what one is inclined to." The Za'id-ul-Musafir is a medical treatise written by the famous physician Abu-Ja'far, in the latter half of the 10th century. In this tome the learned but genial author discourses of the virtues of wine, and pronounces that "the best means to banish a tendency to melancholy. . . is to drink wine with melody, to be merry with one's friends, to occupy oneself with making and reciting verses, and to contemplate running water, gardens, verdure, and sweet fresh faces. . . . The curative treatment is best noticed when quaffing one sees seated around him agreeable figures, whose shape the Creator hath perfected and finished their graces,"—with divers other reflections on the delights to be had in converse with the fair among women, with which it is not fitting to cumber the page in a more delicate generation. This counsel of the physician has, as Count Gobineau noted, never been neglected in Central Asia, and intoxication is still a popular

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and venial peccadillo among the Mussulmans of those provinces. The practice supplied symbols to the mystics and metaphors to the poets, and the grape juice stood for the spirit of God, and its intoxication for the ecstacies of grace.

Persian Nationalism.

The sequence of political events gave further strength to Persian particularism in the age of Umar. By this time the Khalifate of the Abbasids was well in its last decline, and there was no observable anxiety in any quarter to maintain the institution. In Persia at least, in the 10th century, it may almost be said, Islam, or at any rate the Arab connection, was already out of fashion. Indeed the desires of the inhabitants, as far as they were active, were all set upon the downfall of Arab suzerainty. Persia proper revolted under the Buwayhid princes, who in 932, divided it into the three principalities of Fars, of Irak with Kerman, and of Rai, Hamadan, and Ispahan. The strongest of these chieftains became the custodian and often the jailor of the titular ruler at Baghdad. Under these princes, after a silence of three centuries, the Persian language again found expres-

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sion in a new form, and gave the resurgent land a literature in its own tongue. The former Pahlavi language had died at the Arab conquest; it came to life again under the native princes as modern Persian. It has now, for nine centuries, continued to be spoken with hardly any change except a more generous mixture of foreign words, in every bazar in Central Asia, and can still be heard even among the tribes of expatriated gipsies in the plains of India. The first poem in the reformed Persian language had been sung by Abbas when the Khalifa Ma'mun entered Merv with his victorious army. But under national stimulus its growth was such that, two centuries later, in the reign of Mahmud of Ghazni, Persian literature was already at its highest, and is made illustrious by the genius of Firdausi. The new spirit of creative art had dawned under the Buwayhid and Samanid Princes. The happy usurpation of sovereignty by Mahmud of Ghazni was brightened by its noon-day effulgence. Mahmud, the offspring of a Turkish slave, based his policy upon the encouragement of Persian nationalism, on which he relied for his designs against the power of the Khalifate. His administration was directed to founding a Central Asian empire, and in his

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conflict with the Arab the Turk needed the help of Persia. He was not disappointed, and the appeal to national feeling was successful. Persian men of letters greeted the triumphs of a Turkish ruler as the restoration of a patriotic sovereign, and discovered in the conquests of a Turkish clan the revival of an ancient monarchy. The Sultan used his authority with wisdom. He lent his name to the advancement of learning, and his Court became, in the language of Persian exaggeration, "a firmament lit by innumerable stars" or "a carpet studded with inestimable gems."

When, therefore, Umar was born, probably about 1030 some ten years after the death of Sultan Mahmud, the Ghaznavi, Central Asia was already a co-ordinated and national Persian country, its people tolerant of thought that deviated from the orthodox, and reputed for their scholarship and letters.

A similar policy of fostering national feeling, and a similar patronage of men of letters was maintained by the new Turkish dynasty of the Seljuks, which in 1034 overthrew the Sultan's son and successor, Mas'ud, and was further extended on

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the advice of the great minister, Nizam-ul-Mulk, Persia acquired even greater weight in the affairs and culture of Islam when, in 1055, the Seljuk monarch, Toghrul, became in title as well as in fact, by authorised proclamation as well as by usurpation, the ruler of Mesopotamia, Syria and Asia Minor and of a united Persia. Thus, till some time about the age of fifty, Umar lived in an atmosphere of triumphant Persianism, both in the form of government, and in the more subtle, but more important, influences of the spirit.

One has to picture Umar Khayyam, therefore and his contemporaries living in ease and ample comfort in a fertile province, supported by the accretions of victory and the business of a victorious capital, and uplifted by the consciousness of moral leadership. They were the subjects, it is true, of a Turkish sovereign, reliant in the last resort upon the scimitars of his tribesmen. But the fierce conquerors had voluntarily submitted to the Persian spirit. Their campaigns had swept away in a few years turbulent chieftains of the national blood: but they had replaced them by a government stable and no less national, and their disappearance had been a benefit to a distracted

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population. And, in a broader aspect, the new rulers had appeared rather as kinsmen in the struggle against the arrogant Arabs, whose conquest still smarted in Persian memories and obscured the retrospect of past glories. Under a Seljuk king, with Persian ministers and civil servants, with the Persian language spoken at Court, and Persian colleges at every provincial capital, with frontiers that stretched from China to the Mediterranean Sea and from the Oxus to the Indian Ocean, the Persian citizen could, with right, feel himself re-established in the line of descent from the subjects of the Great Kings. But the very vastness of the victory induced security and national pride was without the efforts of personal energy. Changes of dynasty could be regarded by the subjects without anxiety, like passing clouds upon a mountain summit, when the rock of empire appeared so broadly based and so securely buttressed. The only rival power was the Byzantine Empire, and it was weak and nerveless. To the people of Khorassan the battles against its armies may well have seemed mere incidents on a frontier, and the defeat of the Byzantine commander, Romanus Diogenes, in August 1071 by Alp Arslan must have inspired complete tranquillity.

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During the same period, while Umar was growing through youth to middle age, a similar predominance was gained by Persia in the world of thought. In the tenth century philosophy had found its finest and completest expression in the society of the Ikhwan-us-safa, whose name translated means "the brethren of purity." This society, like the French Encyclopaedists of the eighteenth century, conducted their speculations on a materialist plan and attacked all problems with the instrument of the human understanding. They had a bias to natural science and tried to found a philosophy on its discoveries. In Umar's own time, philosophy had found its last representative in Avicenna. The Al Shafa' of that philosopher is the most systematic exposition of his doctrines. In this work he teaches that God, the absolute, is a substance unperceived and not susceptible of demonstration, but a substance in which all attributes or things cohere and have their being. He styles this absolute the Wájab-al-wujud, which means the necessary condition of all existences. The thought is based partly upon Aristotle and still more upon Plotinus. But he does not go to the length of rejecting

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the Qur'an, though he contrives to explain it away. He suggests, as some modern thinkers have suggested in regard to Christian teachings, that its code with its punishments and rewards may be useful for guiding vulgar minds, though unnecessary for the '*arif* or educated man. His moral system like that of the Nicomachean Ethics is based upon a middle course between the extremes of excess and defect, in which qualities are not good or bad in themselves but only in their application to circumstance. He does not allow that action should be governed entirely either by the senses or by the reasoning faculty. But he does hold that the desire for good is an innate disposition, born of the union of soul and body. The philosopher's treatise on love amplifies the doctrine on one side in the sense of Plotinus, and declares that the absolute reality is love and love the supreme good.

At the same time, the more timid thinkers, who wished to use reason to support the foregone conclusions of theology but shrank from it when it contradicted faith, found their most brilliant exponent in Al Ghazzali, whose name in that age was as venerable to what calls itself advanced

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religious thought as Eucken has been to similar minds in Europe. From the semblance of rationalism that he hung upon his arguments and his support of private judgment as long as it did not conflict with revealed prophecy, he obtained and deserved the popular title of "proof of Islam." Al Ghazzali, too, was a native of Khorassan, where he was born in 1058. He was therefore a compatriot and contemporary, as he was also an acquaintance, of Umar Khayyam. He worked for some years as a professor in the College of Baghdad, to which he had been appointed, and returned therefrom to Nishapur and thence to his birthplace Tus. He died fourteen years before Umar, in the year 1109 at the age of fifty-one.

The Period of Reaction.

Umar's youth and middle age had been passed in this environment, with the companionship of men of the upper class and recognised men of letters, prosperous, honoured and well-rewarded, in a fellowship which enjoyed the good things of the world, not least wine and the love of woman and melody. Religion was kept well in the background and thought inclined rather to pessimism

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and quietism with pure speculation in one quarter and pantheistic mysticism in another. But with the last decade of the century, and the sixth of his life, the atmosphere changed and Umar found himself in surroundings as strange to him as those after the Great War now appear to men who grew up in the nineties and enjoyed the insouciance and easy freedom of King Edward's reign. Nizam-ul-Mulk, the minister, was murdered in the year 1092, and his sovereign Malik Shah soon followed him to the grave. Dynastic conflict and international and civil wars were the sequence of these calamities. Khorassan and Irak were divided and Syria and Kerman separated from the Empire. During the disruption of the Seljuk Government a succession of meaningless names is thrown upon the screen and Umar could in turn learn and forget the names and dignities of Mahmud and Barkiyaruk, Tutush and Muhammad, of Malik Shah the second and of Sanjar, who passed a slightly lengthier reign on the lesser throne of Khorassan. At the same time the religious reaction became more confident and more active. With the murder of Nizam-ul-Mulk, the dissident Ismailis had won their most sensational stroke.

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Their followers increased at each plunge of the dagger. The massacre of these sectaries ordered by Barkiyaruk was only partial, and the continued weakness of the Central Government served to encourage those desperate men who could combine crime with piety and attain sanctity in the gratification of their senses. After the death of the Sultan Mahmud in 1118, the followers of the new heresy had no further dangers to fear from a sovereign's indignation. They used the license afforded them by a government's weakness and captured for their party stronghold after stronghold in Persia and in Syria. In 1149 they succeeded in assassinating Raymond, Count of Tripoli, and in 1192 Conrad of Montferrat, King of Jerusalem. The dangerous heresy was not extirpated till in 1252 the castle of Alamut was seized by the savage Tartar Hulagu-Khan. It was shortly after its capture that the history and character of the sect was described in the travels of Marco Polo.

But the fury of the sectarian Ismailis was only an extreme and aggravated symptom of a general religious reaction. The Seljuks had recently become adherents of Islam and it is

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likely that they brought to their new creed the usual fervour of converts. Of their princes it can indeed be said with truth that they showed no great leanings to bigotry. But a Turkish soldiery may well have gone beyond the moderation of their leaders. This is at any rate the most probable explanation of an undoubted retrogression to theological intemperance. The Hanbali school of doctrine was in particular noted for its strait and rigid discipline. But a marked reaction towards strict orthodox observance was as observable in every quarter as were, at a later date in Europe, the effects of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The easy tolerance of the age that had nourished an Avicenna lapsed into disuse and life became hard for the sceptic or free-thinker. Even the Sufis bent before the blast and undertook that task of reconciling Pantheism and the way of love with the naked letter of the Qur'an, which was for the next century to consume their energies. The sectarian frenzies are manifest in the chronicles of the time, and the disorders of civil hatred were inflamed by fanatical zeal. In 1095 at the height of these disturbances, while an army of one of the

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Amirs of Khorassan was laying siege to Nishapur, the disciples of the rival religious schools of Shaf'i and Hanafi were busy slaying each other in the streets and bye-ways.

The First Crusade.

While the Mussalman world was thus distracted by the rivalries of princes and the insolence of sectaries, it was for the first time exposed to outside attack from barbarous levies, kindled partly by hopes of plunder and wealth, but mainly by an even more intemperate credulity. The Byzantine emperors had long desired to regain their lost dominions in Asia Minor. But they had trembled before the might of the Seljuk kingdom. A piece of stupid persecution by the Khalifa Bi' amrullah had, however, made an attack inevitable through the indignation it had excited in Christendom. The cruelty shown to the Patriarch by an ignorant Turkish Governor of Jerusalem, the Amir Ortok, had now made battle urgent. The first crusade was preached by a crazy fanatic: he incited at once the greed of savage chiefs and the superstitions of their subject serfs. But the feelings of the crusaders were exploited by the ambitious, though feeble, Court of Byzantium,

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which preserved alive the name and had even, to some extent, revived the culture of Eastern Rome. That Court regarded the uncouth inhabitants of Europe beyond the limits of the Empire as nameless barbarians, to whom it would hardly allow the title of human beings. The ministers of Imperial policy were withheld by no compunction from seeking the advantage of the imperial city in the wholesale slaughter of such victims. They invited their assistance and deigned to bestow the honour of an alliance. It was in March 1096 that the hordes of the crusaders set out upon their expedition. Their impact almost brought the tottering Empire of Byzantium to destruction. But it preserved itself by diplomacy and succeeded in sending forward its despised auxiliaries to conquest or to death. Antioch was torn from the Persian Empire by the crusaders in 1092. In the year 1099 Jerusalem was conquered by Godfrey of Bouillon, and its capture signalized by all the rapine and cruelty of a dirty and brutal mob in a civilized and luxurious city. In a few hours its invaders succeeded in murdering seventy thousand Mussalmans of both sexes and all ages, while an unascertained number of Jews, women

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as well as men, were burnt alive in the synagogues to which they had run for refuge. The sacred city had been saved by Western Christianity.

The Last Years of Umar's

The last thirty years of Umar's life were spent in this welter of fanaticism and superstition, of disorder and barbarity. The crusaders might perhaps be disregarded as a disagreeable incident of hasty imperial expansion which had brought a civilised power into contact with virile, but to a Persian eye inferior, races. At Nishapur in the home country of the Empire, even the loss of Jerusalem might perhaps be contemplated in much the same spirit, though with intenser distress at the accompanying massacre, with which Englishmen regarded the capture of Khartoum by the Mahdi. But the reaction within the Islamic world itself pressed more sharply on the every day life of the educated classes and must have induced a more actual and persistent discomfort. The oppressive circumstances again brought to the surface a peculiar habit or quality of the Persian character which is known by the almost untranslateable word "Ketman." This is a deception, and yet not exactly deceit: a falsity that is not quite a

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falsehood: a hypocrisy that does not touch the inner judgment. It is a habit, general and explicitly approved among the Persians, of professing current orthodoxy in public while adhering firmly to private belief, and adopting conventional behaviour for common use while diverging in intimate society. It has been elevated to a rule of conduct and permits a Shi'ah adherent in a Sunni land to follow the observances and adopt the name of the rival faith. It is a Jesuistry not recognised or practised by the Society of Jesus. It is due to *Ketman* that in modern Persia disguised Babis and Bahais pass as orthodox believers, and that wine is freely drunk in social circles in spite of public prohibition. Little more is in fact demanded than lip-service. By a convention of general convenience all public declarations are taken at their face value. A man may be familiarly known for a heretic or free-thinker and his neighbours aware of his shortcomings: but he will gain general acceptance as a true Mussalman if only in the spirit of *Ketman* he repeats the creed and performs the stated prayers. In the study of the quatrains of Umar it is necessary to reckon with this quality.

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The last stage of the poet's life was passed in such surroundings. But even in those years it is unlikely that any serious doubts could have crossed his mind about the permanent stability of the civilisation in which he had grown up and prospered. For four centuries power and learning had been the appanages of Islam. In her girdle were the keys of all the world and in her coffers the heritage of East and West. Judaea and Chaldea and the fabled wealth of Syria, the pure contours of Greece and the prolific splendour of Rome, the opulence of Byzantine royalty and the renunciation of the Christian saints, all had passed to the civilisation of the Oxus and the Euphrates. While Europe was riven by barbarian hordes, while cruel nobles and crueller priests struggled for plunder or subsistence, and the amusements of their leisure were but licentious loves or bloody tournaments, the Universities of Islam and the palaces of her sovereigns had given a home to art and to philosophy. Not to Umar, not to any man then living, was it possible to conjecture the havoc and utter devastation that were so soon to come upon creed and people at the fire and sword of savage tribes from the

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northern steppes. Hafiz saw the ruin before his eyes, and in his song revived by a last effort the elegance and fragrance of an age for ever gone. Umar was the poet of its hey-day, its flippant ease and learned scepticism.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF UMAR'S RUBA'IAT

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The Significance of Umar's Ruba'iat.

Plan of The Ruba'iat.

There are some technical matters that have to be taken into account, before a final consideration of the value and significance of the quatrains of Umar Khayyam can be attempted. It has been shown that during Umar's lifetime his position rested, both in his own eyes and those of others, upon his abstract intellectual studies and his research in mathematics and astronomy. The quatrains were lightly thrown off in his leisure hours. They were occasional verses in which he expressed a moral or amused his friends. They may have first been repeated to acquaintances, have gradually obtained publicity, and perhaps finally been collected and arranged by the poet himself or by a secretary. They are not and were never intended to be a systematic or consistent whole. They were not meant to be great work, to conceive, that is, a large subject in all its varied detail on one harmonising design. They were not even written under any continuous inspiration

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or with any protracted effort. They are in fact miniatures in which a learned mind sought emotional relief after toilsome traverses at the rarefied altitudes of abstract thought. The quatrains have, therefore, no logical consistency: they are the artistic expression of varied moods and feelings.

Moreover, it is the invariable practice in all collections of Persian poems to arrange them, not in any logical nexus, but artificially according to the alphabetical order of the last consonants of the rhyming words. Adjoining quatrains, therefore, not merely have no relation of sense or emotional context to each other, but may very well be the work of the poet at very different periods of his life. In any English anthology it is at any rate possible to discover the development of a poet's thoughts or emotions as he grew older. But in the Ruba'iat of Umar Khayyam a quatrain written at the end of a full life by an octogenarian may be placed at the side of a first passionate cry of youth. And there exists no touchstone by which they can be distinguished.

Finally, it must be admitted, the text of the quatrains, as they exist, is doubtful and unveri-

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fied. There are, to start with, some four-score "wandering" quatrains, that have at various times been included in a "Diwan" or "collected edition" of Umar's verse, which are also found published on no less authority—sometimes on better—in the works of other poets. Moreover, the number of quatrains in the extant manuscripts shows a suspicious tendency to grow as their dates become more remote from the poet's death. The oldest manuscript so far discovered is that in the Bodleian Library, written at Shiraz in the year 865 after the Hijra. That collection contains 158 quatrains only. One manuscript in the India Office contains 362 quatrains, another at the India Office has 512, and a manuscript with the Calcutta Asiatic Society contains 516 in all. Miss Cadell, a diligent student, writing in 1882, stated that she had found in all nearly 1,200 quatrains going about somewhere or another in Umar's name. She, however, placed the number of genuine quatrains as between 250 and 300.* The fact of course is that, though the orthodox critics omitted Umar's name from their list of great poets, his ruba'iat very quickly achieved high popular-

* See Frazer's Magazine, May 1879.

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ity among the public. The verses were most congenial to the Persian temperament by their humour and their audacity. They were especially pleasing to those, and they were still many, who leant to free-thought even when they were forced to conform in appearance. Their popularity is vouched for in many texts and at many dates. In India the Emperor Akbar repeated the common appreciation and even ventured to place him beside Hafiz, exclaiming that every ode of Hafiz should be followed by a quatrain of Umar, as to read the ode without the quatrain was like drinking wine without a relish.† Now in an Oriental country, where a poet's works are not manifolded in printed editions but copied one by one in manuscript, it is the easiest and most natural thing in the world for an admirer at a later date to insert in the copy either his own or some other chosen verses. It also happens not infrequently that a quatrain quoted in the margin for reference from another writer is by a foolish scribe brought into the main body of a later copy. These are factors which account for most of what cannot but be additions to the

† See 'Ain-i-Akbari—Blochmann's edition, Vol. II, p. 238.

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body of genuine quatrains. To any careful reader, also, it will be clear on a reading that religious prejudice has included some far from genuine quatrains. The general tone of Umar's mind—the general tone of his verses—is plain enough. The reader may or may not like it: but it can hardly be mistaken. When, therefore, here and there a quatrain is found of an entirely contrary complexion, and when it is one obviously adapted to support orthodox faith or accepted mysticism, then it may be taken as certain that it is an interpolation that never fell from Umar's pen. If these are merely utterances of moods that even a non-believer might occasionally feel—as even an atheist visiting St. Peter's may feel a certain religious sensation evoked by the music or the devotion of the crowd—when they merely reflect an emotion and do not bear witness to a creed, then indeed it might be right to credit Umar's authorship, and it might not be fair to reject them without further proof. But such verses are few. In most cases of quatrains of this tendency, there is almost complete certainty that they are not genuine. But apart from verses whose matter provides such an immediate test, it is by style alone next to impossible to discriminate between

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false and genuine quatrains. The safe course is to include in the text all that cannot at once be excluded, but to read the text with the knowledge that some at any rate—perhaps a large number—are not the poet's work, though all of his must be in the collection. Whinfield's careful recension, which will be followed in this review of Umar's work,* has been made on this principle. Of the quatrains included in it perhaps a hundred should be discarded: of the rest the probable authority may be accepted.

The metrical form in which Umar has chosen to write is the ruba'i, of which the Arabic plural is ruba'iat. The name is taken from the Arabic word for "four," since, as is well-known, the stanza has four lines. It is a Persian invention of some antiquity, but was really brought to popular use as a vehicle for epigram by Abu Sa'id, a poet who lived from 968 to 1049, a little before Umar. Its tersity, its point and bite seem to have suited it peculiarly to the people, and it has continued popular to this day. The effect most reminds

*References will be to the numbers of the quatrains as printed in Whinfield's second edition, dated 1906, which contains 508 quatrains.

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the reader perhaps of the Greek epigrams, in which the second shorter line gives the same sharp bite and jerk. Of the four lines—technically hemistichs—the first, second and fourth must rhyme, the third need not but often does. The last line is the one that ought to contain the sting or point of the idea, whether satiric or edifying. The actual scansion of the lines—as of all Persian poetry—is on the Arabic model, adopted by the Persians when they remoulded their Pahlavi tongue after the conquest to its later and greater form. It is quantitative, that is to say, and is measured into feet more complicated than those to which the European ear is accustomed. As many as twenty-four schemes of scansion possible for use in these quatrains have been computed by pedantic grammarians. They are, however, really only two, the rest being slight modifications by the contraction of syllables.

Umar's Style.

What metres there are, Umar has used, and his ruba'iat gives a complete reproduction of all that is possible in the quatrain form in Persian. From the technical point of view Umar's style is, for such a form, extraordinarily flexible and his touch

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light and melodious. His use of rhyme is in most cases charming, though there are quatrains in which the feminine rhymes (*radif*) are too long and elaborate to be pleasing. The third line is sometimes in a metre different from the other three, a change which is rather startling.

The language which Umar uses is of an almost studied simplicity, and its very simplicity gives it the force and strength that in his quatrains is so striking, so astonishing. A form so slight is apt to conduce to graceful nothings and ingenious trifles. There may be point, but it is usually the point of a toy soldier's weapon. In Umar's quatrains, however, the steel bites sharp, and the verse is tempered hard. The lines reflect real feeling, deep thought, sometimes an indignation as savage as Juvenal's. Professor Browne—even, one is sorry to see, Sir Percy Sykes, a soldier and a man of action—have echoed the verdict of the Persian professors, and have dismissed Umar's poetry lightly, have treated him as a writer of third-rate rank. But they have surely underrated the qualities of force and sincerity, the primary driving power that must underlie all honest and all good work. Other poets—especially in Persia—

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have been more studied and elaborate, have followed more closely the maxims of school or of academy. They have refined their imagery and chased a more intricate finesse of language or of rhythm. But in the effort of their scholastic, they have too often mislaid their inspiration or botched a design under its decoration. That directness of Umar, that bold, straight, honest rush to the fact, to the one thing that really matters, where can it be found in all the academic writers? Who else in the whole history of Persian poetry could have written?—

"He brought me here first to my great surprise,
From life I've gathered but a dim surmise.
I go perforce. Why come? Why live? Why go?
I know the questions but hear no replies,"
(145)

Umar owes his popularity to his direct appeal. The professors may reprove: but the people of Persia, generation after generation, princes and peasants, common and educated, have repeated and added to the stray epigrams of the defiant poet. The European is not wrong when, fired

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merely by Fitz-Gerald's wonderful version, he classes Umar among the important poets of the world. He is not wrong when, knowing the language and acquainted with Persian feeling, not merely among priests and grammarians, he still approves the verdict and finds in Umar at once a powerful and a charming writer, who expresses as few have done the yearnings and regrets of man the civilized.

His Imagery.

The imagery in which Umar has dealt is of course Oriental, Persian to the core. The dark blue firmament, the bulbul and the rose, the breath of Jesus, the chess-player and the pawns, the mole on the lovely cheek, the black and scented curls of the beloved, these are as common in the Ruba'iat as in other Persian verse. But in Umar they appear fresh, they come unsolicited, they have not the air of being dragged in according to protocol. They may sound curious to a European ear: they never appear stale or insipid. Of how many Persian poets can this be truly said? Hafiz indeed, with the supreme elegance which makes him in his slim, slender sort, the companion of Sophocles and Vergil and Racine, could weave these well-worn fantasies with-

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out incongruity into the perfect patterns of his odes. But, with the singular exception of that prince of Persian poets, no other perhaps has ever manipulated those second-hand "roses and raptures" without artificiality and pose. In Umar the image is alive, it strikes, it is felt. And at least he never elaborates too far: he does not pile metaphor on metaphor, trope upon trope, as is so often the Persian way, till the mind of the reader reels and grows faint under the burden. There is a vitality about his figures that keeps them fresh. And many of the images he uses are his own, or are made his own by the manner of their use. The shattered glass, the potter and the pot—God and mankind—Plato's shadow-play, he uses them all well and with originality. Even common comparisons, as of the sun to a royal prince, he manipulates with skill and vigour, as when he says:—

"The sun doth smite the roofs with Orient ray
And Khusra—like his wine—red sheen display:
Arise and drink! The herald of the dawn
Proclaims the advent of another day."

(233)

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The man who can summon associations in this way is assuredly no mean poet.

His Humour. Umar has another great gift, not any too common in the East, which is a real preservative to his work and makes it wholesome for every man. This is the gift of humour. The Persians as a people are noted for their wit and from their friendly talk and many a popular story or drama there is heard a distinct ringing of laughter. But in the set poems of the race the comic note is rarer: in Umar's quatrains it is a pervading, deep-felt humour, the very nature of the man, one would say, squeezing itself out into something bizarre, even into something sardonic and macabre. One thinks not merely of his sarcasms, of his gibes against prigs and hypocrites. It is more. It is an attitude to life in general, it is an attitude to death! It is a pessimism that laughs because everything, even weeping, is futile; a bitter laughter twisted out of suffering, when even the suffering is so unnecessary in this incongruous universe. He holds always lurking in his mind the vision of human aspiration, but he plays in his twisting humours with the

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actual residue of a little sensual pleasure in a momentary dream of life and will. It is a humour curiously modern, but it betrays the grief of all mankind.

One catches the flavour in this stanza.

"When I am dead, with wine my body lave,
For *obit* chant a Bacchanalian stave,
And, if you need me on the day of doom,
Beneath the tavern threshold seek my grave."

(6)

In lighter mood the same humour expresses itself in another quatrain.

"We bend our necks beneath the yoke of wine,
Yea, risk our lives to gain the smiles of wine,
While menials grasp the flagon by the throat,
And squeeze thereout the lifeblood of the wine."

(21)

Even the verses, so well-known from Fitz-Gerald's charming version, which picture the pot as a lover's clay and liken the handle to an arm thrown upon his sweetheart's waist,

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have surely enough and to spare of this temper of macabre jesting. But it is needless to quote further. Stanza after stanza is shaped by such a humour. It is the sea-salt of his poesy. It is, if anything can be, the hall-mark of its authenticity.

His Thought.

When all is said and done, however, it is more to the matter than to the manner that Umar owes his fame: or rather—shall one say?—it is not to style or verbal nicety but to the perfect fitness with which he has given a dress to drape reflections deeply felt. It is the free-thinker clothing his doubts and disappointed idealism in vigorous words—though with charm and melody—that has won the admiration of so many who with a similar training have suffered such heartburnings. Umar was not the first to express in immortal verse these longings and not different questionings. Ecclesiastes is compounded of the same spirit, with a heightened but perhaps a narrower expression. Lucretius in the great sweep of his systematic vision includes passages as poignant and as bitter-salt, drawn upon a larger composition. Nearest of all to Umar is Abu'l-'Ali al Mu'arra,

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the Arab poet and sceptic, Umar's true predecessor, in some ways perhaps greater, but less terse in expression, less perfect and less varied in form. But it was the Persian who first and for all time compressed eternal doubts and infinite yearnings into the brevities of epigram and passed them current upon the exchange of popular philosophy.

At no time, it appears, were thoughtful Persian scholars blind to the general texture of his mind or to the moral of his poetry. "The inner meanings of his verses," writes Ibn-al-Kifti—a man of piety who made it a reproach to Umar that he was versed in all the wisdom of the Greeks—"the inner meanings are as stinging serpents to Mussulman law." From an important passage, too, in the Tarikh-ul-Hukuma, written 100 years after the poet's death by Jamal-ud-din 'Ali, it is clear enough that the full implications of his unbelief were understood by his contemporaries and that they distinguished him carefully from the mystics of the Sufi school. And indeed Umar is far enough from their ecstacies and divine devotion. Yet he was well-read in their doctrines, and their speech had become a common lan-

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guage and their manner of teaching a commonplace. Umar could no more escape the influence than his neighbours nor—even had he wanted—could he neglect that which, in their manner of vision was noble and valid. Like every Sufi—one might almost say like every man who has thought deep about knowledge and perception—Umar also felt that there must be some one identity to connect and correlate the different sensations derived from the changing panorama of appearances. He too reasoned that there must be in the universe—as in different words the orthodox also preached and believed—some unity, some One and Absolute Being to give reality and meaning to the many facts perceived. To the supreme faith in the one ultimate being he too could subscribe with a clear conscience. Nay, it would almost seem as if Umar might have been ready to agree with the Neo-Platonists and the Sufis that the absolute being expressed itself and was known in love. Beauty at least, he might have said was surely real and eternal, and beauty could be visible only to love. The attraction of atom to atom, of soul to soul, of each thing in the universe to the whole, this was the love that displayed its unity. Umar's view—tinged

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with a dash of Neo-Platonist teaching—is well-expressed in the following stanza :—

" The world's a body and the ' Truth ' its soul,
The angels are its senses, they control
Its limbs—the creatures, elements and
spheres ;
All *seem* to be, *ONE* only *is* the whole."
(36)

It has a graceful echo in another stanza :

" The joyous souls who quaff potations deep
And saints who in the mosque sad vigil keep,
Are lost at sea alike and find no shore,
ONE only wakes, all others are asleep."
(222)

But an abstract opinion that somewhere, hidden from human apprehension, there exists an absolute in which appearances cohere and dissolve their different qualities did not then, any more than it does now, exclude a penetrating scepticism about truth and knowledge and about good and evil in the world, so far as it can be comprehended by the understanding. Umar gives more frequent expression to these doubts. From the

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formless hypothesis of a Being without an attribute the mystic may by solitary hungry contemplation win a gratification, that is like a drunkenness. But for Umar—scientist as well as poet—there was no such ecstacy to be obtained. He differed here from the Sufi as he did from the orthodox believer. The orthodox degraded the concept of absolute Being by ascribing to it acts and attributes, will and the power to make its will effective, by making of it indeed a person or personality; they forgot that a Being or Personality with will-power must be also a Being responsible for results. The Sufis on the other hand had left this absolute reality so remote from human understanding and so empty of known and actual attributes that it could bring little consolation or significance to struggling and suffering mankind. To the sceptic and scientist, it might well seem, no other light was left our guide than just the pleasures of the senses.

With the Sufi teaching about conduct, however, Umar was in clearer agreement—more, it must be admitted, on the negative than on any positive side. They had always taught that it mattered little or nothing whether a man's acts

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conformed to any commandment imposed from outside. What was required, they said, was an inner harmony, to be created by a loving heart, of the man's own soul with the soul of things. They held and held strongly that the important thing in a man was not what he had or what he did, but quite simply what he thought and felt in life. Whether he rebelled against the world's law or obeyed, whether outsiders called his act good or evil, all was yet well with him, if only he was moved by a higher motive of love, by an inner goodness of character, by sympathy with the possibly ideal love and beauty of the universe. Better by far to feel, however imperfectly, from time to time some of this joy of loving sympathy—to give of it perchance at the same time to some other love-hungry soul—even by breach of any rule or commandment of man or of all the prophets—than by abstention to deny the self, and with the self to deny the permanent and real truth of universal life. Umar perhaps would have hesitated to sum up the universe as beautiful—he found this actual world at least only too often ugly and confusing—but he agreed at any rate to the uttermost that what

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mattered was the inner man and that outward conformity was of no avail. For all the formalism of orthodoxy he had nothing but contempt. And as he rejected outward conformities of creed and ceremony, so he laughed at the main articles of faith in regard to sin and responsibility. To the doctrine of sin he keeps recurring, approaching it from the one side in its relation to omnipotence and again from the side of man, the sinner, as he judges himself moved by external forces. The doctrine of predestination again and again is made the target of his sarcasms. The teaching that man is born with his fate already settled for him, whether by heredity and environment—as the modern jargon goes—or, as religious people used to call it, by special grace or original sin, and that in spite of the predestined doom he is still to be punished by a jealous God for the acts to which he had been inscrutably condemned, this doctrine was to all the Sufis a thing incredible and presumptuous. To Umar it was repugnant and abominable. He cried out upon this God and said,

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"What man here below has not sinned, canst thou say?
And how could he have lived, had he not done sin, canst thou say?
So if I do wrong and thou punishest me wrongly,
What difference between Thee and me, canst thou say?".

(398)

He repels the thought again in another place with a vigorous answer,

"Who was it that did mix my clay? Not I.
Who spun my web of silk and wool? Not I
Who wrote upon my forehead all my good
And all my evil deeds? Not I."

(311)

In another and more famous quatrain the same question is repeated.

"When Allah mixed my clay, he knew full well
My future acts and could each one foretell:
Without his fiat nothing can I do!
Is it then just to punish me in hell?"

(100)

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But, when he regards it long and deeply, in the end he can see in the world for all the talk nothing but a game without an object in which men are merely play-things moved by an unseen, unknown, and quite unknowable hand.

"We are the chessmen destined, it is plain,
That great chess-player, Heaven, to entertain.
It moves us on life's chess-board to and fro,
And then in death's dark box shuts up
again."

(270)

But if life was a game played from outside, and if a man's acts were caused for him by the conditions into which, whether by education or circumstances of race and blood, he was brought by birth, then it followed there could be no sin for which he was responsible and that there was no need to take too much to heart the actions that for him at least were inevitable. So at times, it would appear, there is no harm in treating all this business of predestination with a lighter touch. He almost jests with it in the following quatrain:

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"True I drink wine, like every man of sense,
For I know Allah will not take offence;
Before Time was, He knew that I should drink,
And who am I to flout his prescience?"

(197)

The best was to be quiet, to accept one's fate, and not to spin subtle webs about free-will and responsibility in which to ensnare one's judgment and impede one's enjoyment.

"'Twas writ at first' whatever was to be,
By pen unheeding bliss or misery,
Yea, writ upon the tablet once for all,
To murmur or resist is vanity."

(35)

It was good, of course, if a man was compact of a fine and generous temperament, a nature simple and loyal and loving. It might even perhaps be good that in his mind he should delude himself with thinking that his will to do noble acts and be loved was a free-will for which he was responsible; but after all, a delusion it remained, and the good was as much a fated

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heritage as the ugliness and evil of another. But this was no ground for gloom and despondency or for not fleeing from mean and evil men. On the contrary there was every reason for being happy and making the best of what is good, as long as the illusion at the bottom is recognized.

"This world an insubstantial pageant deem;
All wise men know things are not what they seem;
Be of good cheer and drink, and so shake off
This vain illusion of a baseless dream."

(297)

In one of the quatrains, also, there is a characteristic flout that reminds one of Heine's smile or sneer on his death bed, "*c'est son metier de pardonner.*"

"Khayyam! Why weep you that your life is bad?
What boots it thus to mourn? Rather be glad.
He that sins not can make no claim to mercy.
Mercy was made for sinners—be not sad."

(46)

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His View of Knowledge.

As in regard to morals, so in regard to knowledge also, the last word for Umar was that of scepticism. To him it seemed that agnosticism, uncertainty, eternal doubt must, for all their reasonings, be the inevitable rule for all mankind.

"You see the world, but all you see is naught,
And all you say and all you hear is naught.
Naught the four quarters of the mighty earth.
The secrets treasured in your chamber
naught."

The arguments of the human understanding are after all a worthless word-play that can never touch the veiled reality, and the formal creeds must of course be rejected one and all, without a hesitation.

"Some look for truth in creeds and forms
and rules,
Some grope for doubts and dogmas in the
schools.
But from behind the veil a voice proclaims,
Your road lies neither here nor there,
you fools."

(376)

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" In synagogue and cloister, mosque and school,
Hell's terrors and Heaven's lures men's
bosoms rule,
But they who master Allah's mysteries,
Sow not this empty chaff their hearts to fool."

(49)

The only thing in the whole world that is certain is that the creeds are not true. It is not true, it cannot be, that man has from the first been predestined to suffer for the pleasure of some " Sultan in the sky." But why we live, why rather we are conscious and believe that we can understand, yet know, alas, only too well, that we feel, by what concurrence of atoms or spirit we dream for a moment's space before we again dissolve into the darkness, there are riddles to which the poet can suggest no possible answer.

" I studied with the masters long ago,
And long ago did master all they know.
Hear now the end and issue of it all,
' From earth I came and like the wind I go.' "

(353)

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The futility of it all is what most impresses the poet : for hope turns to bitterness and learning is only air like wind.

" My coming brought no profit to the sky,
Nor does my going swell its majesty :
Coming and going put me to a stand,
Ear never heard their wherefore or their why."

(176)

His Pessimism. Arising from this scepticism, arising too, it may well be, from the depths of the national character, there is heard from Umar a melancholy and insistent pessimism that is perhaps the leading motive of his concerted work. It is a pessimism that is transposed both to a minor and a major key. At one time it resounds with the despair of man alone in the unfathomed, inscrutable universe. At other times it plays on the triter themes of life's vicissitudes and of death. In the sixtieth quatrain there is expressed with wonderful vigour the hopelessness of man without faith, left with doubt as his one companion.

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"From mosque an outcast and from church a foe,
Out of what clay did Allah form me so?
Like unfrocked monk or ugly prostitute,
No hopes have I above, no joy below."
(60)

The vanity of human effort is the matter of another striking quatrain.

"The world will last long after my poor fame
Has passed away, yea, and my very name.
Aforetime, ere we came, we were not missed:
When we are dead and gone, 'twill be the same."
(150)

But there is in this vein another quatrain—perhaps the finest—that recalls not without right the noble ode of Sophocles.

"Since all we gain in this abode of woe
Is sorrow's pangs to feel and grief to know,
Happy are they that never came at all,
And they that, having come, the soonest go."
(387)

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In these stanzas the sadness is general, the lament for all humanity. But Umar has achieved what is perhaps his finest poetry and has composed the quatrains that have certainly had the widest and tenderest effect upon men in those moods when he reflects with a delicate and gentle sorrow on the passing of all things that are great and all things that are beautiful. In the admirable transcripts of Fitz-Gerald the quatrains have been, if possible, even more embellished and they sigh on an English tongue to the very breath of sadness. But Whinfield's direct translation from the original has with much success captured their plaintive notes. Of these are the following:

"Days changed to nights, ere you were born, or I,
And on its business ever rolled the sky:
See you tread gently on this dust, perchance
'Twas once the apple of a beauty's eye."

(33)

"Yon turf, fringing the margins of the stream,
As down upon a cherub's lip might seem,
Or grown from dust of buried tulip cheeks:
Tread not that turf with scorn, or light esteem,"

(62)

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"Where ruddy tulips grow and roses red,
Know that a mighty monarch's blood was shed:
And where the violet rears her purple tuft,
Be sure some black-moled girl doth rest her head."

(104)

Best loved of all the quatrains written in this strain is that in which he tells of Bahram Gur, the great Emperor of Persia, he who in his time could invade the Indies and vanquish the army of the Roman commonwealth.

"In these proud halls where Bahram once held sway,
The wild roes drop their young and tigers stray,
And that imperial hunter in his turn
To the great hunter Death is fallen a prey."

(72)

His Pleasure-seeking.

But man cannot always sit aside in sadness and gloom. Sensuous pleasures at all events are afforded, not too ungenerously, by life, and it is well to seize them as they come and, using them, to make the best of this business of living. So pessimism passes

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to hedonism, and the weariness of thought is dispersed in dancing and music. The 26th quatrain marks the transition well.

"My life lasts but a day or two, and fast
Sweeps by, like torrent stream or desert blast.
Howbeit of two days I take no heed—
The day that's coming and the day that's past."

(26)

That we can feel, the poet says in his scepticism, that is the only certainty one has: and with this saying passes to the mood of Horace's *"carpe diem"*. Man moves, did one say? from nothingness to nothingness: yea, but if the nerves remain fit and healthy, the wild flowers are sweet for him upon the hedge-rows where his path lies. A rosy smile or a dimple at the corner of a loving lip can be compensation a thousand times over for those insufficiencies. He makes his heart light with wine, and he walks hand in hand with desire and the fruition of desire. Love is twice-blessed, as every lover knows, for its sufferings are as rich as its delights. It may be that in the last resort even love is nothing, except another illusion, but

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it is at any rate the one thing that seems to be good and real and persists.

"Though you survey, O, my enlightened friend,
The world of vanity from end to end,
You will discover there no other good,
Than wine and rosy cheeks, you may depend."

(377)

Time after time Umar sums up his critique of the practical reason in this wise.

"Since no one can assure thee of to-morrow,
Rejoice thy heart to-day and banish sorrow
With moon-bright wine, fair moon! the moon in heaven
Will look for us in vain on many a morrow."

(7)

"Life void of wine and minstrels with their lutes,
And the soft murmurs of Arabian flutes,
Were nothing worth. I scan the world and see
Save pleasure, life yields naught but bitter fruits."

(86)

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"Get minstrel, wine and Houri, if you can,
A green nook by a streamlet, if you can,
And seek naught better; babble not of hell,
But find a better heaven if you can."

(79)

There is a peculiar note of the Greek spirit—a not too distant echo both of Aristotle and of Plato—in the third line of the following quatrain:

"I worship rose-red cheeks with heart and soul.
I suffer not my hand to quit the bowl,
I make each part of me its function do,
Before each part be joined unto the Whole."

(181)

But, if life's day is to be fully enjoyed, and the darkness forgotten that went before and comes again after, then, says Umar, one thing more is needed—an intoxication that dissolves the inhibitions of the self and relaxes reason. Only in that state of trance which is induced by love or wine can the sub-conscious natural man find his freedom and the spirit be uplifted above its sober restraints. The great secret is, forgetting thought, to live in the rapture of the moment.

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"Why spend life in self-worship and essay
All Being and Not-being to survey?
Since Death is ever pressing at your heels
'Tis best to drink or dream your life away."

(183)

"In drinking thus it is not my design
To riot or transgress the law divine,
Nay, to attain deliverance from self
Is the sole cause I drink me drunk with wine.'

(66)

And of love he has said finely:

"The worshipped love spake to the devotee;
Dost know what made a worshipper of thee?
Because that soul which gazes through thine eyes
Once with its beauty did illumine me."

(14)

His Gallantry. Sceptic as he is, conscious voluptuary as he hopes to be—for all his careless exaltation of the fleeting pleasures of the day—Umar has one splendid quality that is often overlooked, the quality of gallantry and

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bonhomie. A kindly good humour, a frank and generous heart, ring true in all his verses. He bears himself to the world like a gentleman, and has a gallant wave of the hand to death and extinction. He marches on, as to the drums and fifes, and has a jest ready on his tongue to the last end. The rhymes come to his lips with a whistle and he heartens his company with the tune.

"When life's once gone, what's Balkh or Nishapur?
What's sweet or bitter, if the cup runs o'er?
Drink on! There's many a moon will wax and wane
In times to come, when we are here no more."

(134)

It is a soldier's maxim, and in other verses is something of a soldier's joke.

"In Paradise are Houris, preach they so,
And fountains with pure wine and honey flow:
If these be lawful in the world to come
What harm to love their likeness here below?"

(185)

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There is a mellower *bonhomie* in his manner of dealing with hypocrites and their tribe.

"How much more wilt thou chide, absurd divine,
Because I drink or am a libertine?
Keep all thy tedious beads and pious show!
Leave me my jolly mistress and my wine!"

(321)

"Each morn I vow, 'To-night will I repent
Of wine, and tavern haunts no more frequent.'
But spring has come: release me from my vow!
While roses blossom, how can I repent?"

(425)

And then, like a defiance hurled at fate, comes the one great gallant cry.—

"Had I the power great Allah to advise,
I'd bid him sweep away the earth and skies,
Remake a better world, where man might hope
His heart's desire perchance to realise."

(379)

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And like the gallant gentleman he is, Umar has his point of honour also, as have the free companions, the loyal souls, all the world over. "*Il ne faut jamais faire de mal à autrui*"—that after all is the best password if you would carry your head high among other men. In this teaching, Umar had already anticipated the spirit of Anatole France.

" Whate'er thou dost, never grieve thy brother
Nor kindle fumes of wrath his peace to smother :
Dost thou desire to taste eternal bliss,
Vex thine own heart but never vex another !'
(15)

" Better to make one soul rejoice with glee,
Than plant a desert with a colony.
Rather one freeman bind with chains of love,
Then set a thousand prisoned captives free!"
(476)

Nor is he a poor moralist who can close his philosophy with this :—

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"Let him rejoice who has a loaf of bread.
A little nest wherein to lay his head.
Is slave to none and no man slaves for him—
Truly his lot is wondrous well bestead."

(168)

His Modernity.

It is all curiously modern, is this poetry of Umar, and it is also very fine and true. Out of the pessimism and the pantheism of ancient Persia and the doubts and scepticisms of many revolutions, out of the teachings of Islam and the lessons of many creeds, from the sated quietism of a prosperous age, and the commencing convulsions of great usurpations, he has wrought in short stinging epigrams the very meaning of modernity, and filled it with the bravery and mirth, as with the sad wistfulness, of his own personality. There are times when he looks mournfully upon the destruction of past glories, and is passing weary of doubts that can find no anchorage and of the *non possumus* of the understanding. But he turns again to the tavern, and, as he tastes the wine and kisses the lip, the sorrow departs and his heart is uplifted. So when the hour tolls when he too must pass, he will go away into the darkness like a gentleman with a little smile,

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knowing that this too will be a darkness empty and without a secret. He will perhaps be a trifle regretful, for life after all is not without its amusement, and, even if it is a little stupid, one would somehow be sorry to have missed it all. While youth lasts, there is gaiety in the mere act of living, and even when the body grows feebler with the passing years, there is still held close in the mind an ever fresh fragrance of recollected kisses and perhaps for some, the chosen and the luckiest, the undying memories of great passion shared. Yes, it is all strangely modern, this poetry of the Persian, after so many centuries, with its doubts, its bitterness and its consolations. It is by this right that Umar has become the one Eastern poet who is really known and really loved in modern Europe.

[THE END.]

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